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AM-COUP-BACKO 2 BANGUI

REPORTERS WERE TODAY ALLOWED TO VISIT THE NOTORIOUS NGARAGBA JAIL IN BANGUI WHERE BOKASSA IS ALLEGED TO HAVE TAKEN PART IN THE MASSACRE OF SCORES OF CHILDREN EARLIER THIS YEAR.

JAIL DIRECTOR OTTO SACHER SAID THE CHILDREN WERE DETAINED AT THE PRISON FOR FOUR DAYS IN APRIL BUT HE DID NOT KNOW WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO THEM AFTERWARDS.

MR SACHER, A 62-YEAR-OLD CZECHOSLOVAK-BORN EX-MEMBER OF THE FOREIGN LEGION, SAID HE KNEW THAT SOME OF THE CHILDREN HAD BEEN BEATEN TO DEATH ELSEWHERE IN BANGUI.

MR BACKO TOLD REPORTERS THAT HE KNEW BOKASSA HAD GONE TO NGARAGBA DURING THE NIGHT TO BEAT THE CHILDREN WHO HAD TAKEN PART IN DEMONSTRATIONS AGAINST HAVING TO WEAR UNIFORMS.

ALMOST 300 PRISONERS WERE RELEASED FROM THE JAIL TODAY LEAVING AS THE ONLY INMATES 23 MURDERERS.

MR SACHER, WHO SAID BOKASSA JAILED HIM FOR SEVEN MONTHS IN 1972 AFTER A PRISON ESCAPE, SAID THAT NGARAGBA SOMETIMES HELD UP TO 1,400 PRISONERS ALTHOUGH IT WAS DESIGNED TO HOLD ONLY 275. THE SQUALOR OF THE TINY CELLS OF THE STONE BUILT PRISON, WHICH WAS ERECTED IN 1944, WAS APPALLING.

MESSAGES SCRAWLED ON THE WALLS BY FORMER INMATES REFERRED TO FREEDOM AND GOD.

MORE 1527

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